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NEWS RELEASE

Valles Caldera Trust Recaps 2013 Challenges and Successes

(Jemez Springs, NM) – For the second time in less than 24 months a downed power line dramatically changed the best laid plans of the Valles Caldera Trust (the trust). The Thompson Ridge Fire of 2013 burned more than 23,000 acres of the Valles Caldera National Preserve (preserve) less than two years after the 2011 Las Conchas Fire scorched 30,000 acres. Both fires figure prominently in the trust's *Report to Congress for Fiscal Year 2013* (October 1, 2012 through September 30, 2013).

The 2013 Annual Report to Congress (RTC) details how post-fire flooding destroyed the preserve headquarters' drinking water collection system, and prevented use of the buildings for overnight activities on the preserve last summer. Preservation actions implemented by the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) team managed to prevent floods from damaging the historic structures. Defensive measures will continue in 2014.

Summer flash floods through the Las Conchas Fire burn scar impacted both the natural resources and the business future of the trust. Floodwaters damaged and closed transportation arteries on the preserve and reduced tourist access. Despite the fire's impacts, visitation exceeded 98,000 people in 2013 which was 12,000 less than in 2012.

Forest and riparian restoration activities continued in 2013. Previous forest restoration actions proved strategically valuable to firefighters during the Thompson Ridge Fire by providing a point

to anchor sections of the fire line. Scientific inventory and monitoring continued at a high level, with outside funding from grants to collaborating institutions exceeding \$4.8 million.

Financial challenges forced some budget cutting and consolidation in 2013. The RTC notes that the Federal budget sequester in 2013 significantly impacted trust operations. The appropriations to the trust were reduced to \$3.1 million from a budgeted \$3.4 million. To accommodate the shortfall the trust terminated the lease of its administrative office in Jemez Springs and moved into the Science and Education Center (SEC).

The RTC recounts that fiscal year 2014 also began with the significant challenge of three weeks lost production during the partial government shutdown. That was followed by the transfer of the trust Administrative Officer to another agency and the retirement of the Executive Director. The search for qualified individuals to fill those key leadership roles is under way.

The report adds that the 2014 livestock program is established and ready for implementation in June. Planning work on permanent public recreation programs and infrastructure is underway and will be completed by spring, 2015. Science and education programs are functioning at peak levels. Forest restoration activities continue on schedule. Recreation programs will continue to recover as the preserve's natural resources heal from the fires of 2011 and 2013.

The 2013 Valles Caldera Trust Annual Report to Congress is available at:

<http://www.vallescaldera.gov/about/trust/docs/AnnualReportCongress2013.pdf>

The Valles Caldera Trust oversees the Valles Caldera National Preserve, formerly the privately owned "Baca Ranch." The 89,000 acre property is located in the Jemez Mountains in northern New Mexico. It was purchased by the federal government in 2000 under the Valles Caldera National Preservation Act. The property is known for its huge meadows, abundant wildlife, meandering stream, remarkable scenery and science based adaptive management. More information about the Preserve can be found at www.vallescaldera.gov.

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